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12

## Local Lawns Invaded By An Army of Worms

By AMY ROLLINS

Give a worm an inch, he'll take a yard.

That's the predicament facing many local homeowners this week in the wake of an infestation of lawn-eating worms.

They're called Armyworms and local landscapers say they're destroying lawns all across town.

Emmett Sheehan of Eagle's Nest Landscaping said this is



the first time he has seen these worms in Duxbury.

"We're told that they are southern worms. This is the first time they've been in Duxbury since the 1940s," Sheehan said.

continued on page 3

"They are absolutely devastating Duxbury lawns. They've caught everybody by surprise."

According to online gardening sources, Armyworms are the larvae of heavy-bodied, night flying moths. The white or greenish eggs of the worms are laid in groups of several hundred worms. Recognized by a white "Y" on the head, three yellow stripes down the back and a dark band on either side of the stripe, the larvae can grow up to two inches long.

The worms are most active from mid-March to October. They attack both turf-grasses and grains and the most common damage they cause on turf is defoliation. The worms chew off grass blades above the surface of the soil; the damage then appears as circular spots of dead grass in depressed areas of the lawn. An entire lawn can be defoliated and turn brown in less than three days.

Landscaper Marc Hennigan said research he has read explained the worms to be from the Midwest. "I guess they're usually in Ohio, but now for some reason they're in Duxbury. We don't know why they've come."

No area in Duxbury is safe from the invasion of the worms. Landscapers have been working on lawns from Washington Street to Tremont Street and Forest Street.

"The infestation is all over Duxbury, Plymouth, Halifax and even as far north as

2/2



**This Lantern Lane lawn is one of many that have suffered at the hands of the Armyworm.**  
*Photo by Jen Carleton*

Hingham," said Plymouth landscaper Fran Rocchi. He said his company is overrun with calls for curing lawns overcome by the worms. "We are treating the problem with a synthetic insecticide, but we can't be certain of the results. We have no history of the problem here so we can't be sure if they'll re-infest. All we have is the research from other states who've had the problem but we can't be sure that those situations will coincide with the circumstances in Massachusetts."

Once the worm's food supply has been exhausted, they will move in army-like hordes to nearby fields and lawns. Entire neighborhoods have succumbed to the appetites of these worms.

"Just yesterday I sprayed the Forest Street area," said Hennigan. "All the lawns in the neighborhood are infested. The damage there is almost similar to what a white grub would do."

Anxious homeowners can watch for the worms at dusk,

as they come out to feed in the cool night air. "We can see them in early evenings, chewing on grass blades, they look like a worm or a caterpillar," said Hennigan.

Lantern Lane resident Debbie Neal recently sprayed her lawn for the worms. "My neighbor was having a party one night and she swore she could see them marching across the street," Neal said.

"It's pretty discouraging to look out on my lawn and see brown crab-grass instead of green."

So far, a variety of insecticides seem to kill the larvae off in one day. But, Hennigan said, he plans on spraying his customer's lawns at least once or twice more this season.

Local landscapers recommend chemical control to solve and even prevent the infestation. Insecticides include diazinon, Orthene and liquid Sevin. They said it is advisable to apply treatment before serious plant damage occurs.